

Message Text

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45

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 /072 W

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O P 301345Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6107

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY SANA

RUQMTI/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 815

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 KUWAIT 4139

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: IAP, PGOV, KU

SUBJ: EMBASSY COMMENTS ON KUWAITI CABINET RESIGNATION AND
DISSOLUTION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: (A) KUWAIT 4127, (B) KUWAIT 4022 (NOTAL).

1. SUMMARY: ACTIONS BY AMIR IN ACCEPTING RESIGNATION
OF PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET, DISSOLVING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,
CALLING FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION AND PLACING PRESS UNDER
TIGHTER CONTROL APPEAR TO RESULT PRIMARILY FROM SABAH RULING

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FAMILY CONCERN OVER INTERNAL SECURITY AND STABILITY OF KUWAIT.

WHILE IRRESPONSIBLE AND DILATORY TACTICS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND CRITICISM FROM SAUDIS AND GULF STATES RE KUWAIT'S "DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT" WERE PROBABLY TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT, EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT BASIC ANXIETY OF KUWAIT VIEWS ABOUT IMPACT ON KUWAIT OF LEBANESE CRISIS AND ITS POSSIBLE SOLUTION AND OF GENERAL DISARRAY IN ARAB WORLD IS PRINCIPAL REASON FOR RESTRICTIVE STEPS TAKEN. MINDFUL OF THE 250,000 PALESTINIAN MINORITY IN KUWAIT AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT KUWAIT MIGHT BECOME NEXT BATTLEGROUND FOR PALESTINIAN DISAFFECTED BY SETBACKS IN LEBANON, SABAH RULING FAMILY HAS DECIDED TO "BATTEN DOWN HATCHES" WITH PREVENTIVE ACTIONS DESIGNED TO FORESTALL SUCH EVENTUALITY. END SUMMARY.

2. KUWAITI AMIR SABAH AL-SALEM AL-SABAH'S ACTION IN ACCEPTING RESIGNATION OF GOK CABINET AND DISSOLVING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TOOK PLACE WITH ALMOST NO ADVANCE WARNING. QUESTION OF RESHUFFLE OF CABINET IS NOT NEW ONE, BUT TIMING AND EXTENT OF AMIRI ACTIONS HAVE STUNNED LOCAL COMMUNITY. FIRMNESS OF ACTION AND ELEMENT OF SURPRISE SHOWS THAT LEADERS OF SABAH FAMILY, WHO HAVE LONG DOMINATED EXECUTIVE POWER IN KUWAIT, ARE STILL ABOUT TO MOVE DECISIVELY AND IN SECRECY.

3. ROLE OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. PART OF SURPRISE RELATES TO QUESTION RE REASONS FOR NEED OF SUCH DRASTIC ACTION ORDERED BY AMIRI DECREES (REF A). CABINET RESHUFFLE COULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITH LESS FANFARE AND, WHILE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS BEEN OBSTREPEROUS FROM TIME TO TIME, ITS ANTICS SEEMED OUTWARDLY TO CONTRIBUTE MORE TO DELAY THAN TO ACTUAL BLOCKING OF BASIC LEGISLATION DEEMED NECESSARY BY GOK. HOWEVER, IT MAY BE THAT, VIEWED IN THE KUWAITI CONTEXT RATHER THAN IN THE EYES OF FOREIGN OBSERVERS WHOSE COUNTRIES MANAGE TO PROGRESS DESPITE EVEN MORE POWERFUL AND DIFFICULT PARLIAMENTS, THE INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BECAME MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE GULF STATE TO ABIDE. WE HAVE NOTED THAT GOK MINISTERS, INCLUDING SUCH POWERFUL ONES AS INTERIOR AND DEFENSE MINISTER SHAIKH SA'AD, SEEMED RESTRICTED IN THEIR DECISION-MAKING BECAUSE OF CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE REACTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. SMALL VOCAL LEFTIST OPPOSITION GROUPS IN THE ASSEMBLY CLEARLY MADE MINISTERS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THEIR CRITICISM AND PROBING QUESTIONS. THE QUALITY OF THE CRITICISMS

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CHANGED SOMEWHAT, TOO, IN THE 1975-76 ASSEMBLY SESSION. IT MAY BE RECALLED THAT THE ASSEMBLY'S FORMAL REPLY TO AMIR'S OCTOBER 1975 ADDRESS (OPENING THE ASSEMBLY) WAS REJECTED AS UNACCEPTABLE FOR ITS CRITICAL TONE AND THAT THIS ISSUE WAS STILL ALIVE. ALSO, THE VERBAL ATTACK BY ASSEMBLYMAN KHALED AL-MA'SUD ON THE PRIME MINISTER/CROWN PRINCE LAST SPRING CREATED SOME TENSION HERE.

4. HOWEVER, ASSEMBLY'S FAILURE TO DEAL WITH LEGISLATION PROPOSED BY THE EXECUTIVE, TO WHICH THE DECREE DISBANDING THE ASSEMBLY ALLUDES, MAY HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT FACTOR. KUWAIT HAS BECOME AN ENERGETIC, FAST-MOVING SOCIETY WHOSE FABRIC IS, NEVERTHELESS, STRAINED BY A VARIETY OF NEW SOCIAL PRESSURES. GOK HAS TAKEN IT UPON ITSELF TO EASE THESE PRESSURES IN VARIOUS WAYS, BY LIBERAL FUNDING OF WELFARE AND OTHER SOCIAL PROGRAMS. IT ALSO BELIEVES THAT RAPID ACTION TO RELIEVE THESE PRESSURES IS VITAL TO POLITICAL STABILITY. ASSEMBLY, HOWEVER, WAS A POTENTIAL IF NOT ACTUAL BAR TO RAPID ACTION. ALSO, POWERFUL KUWAITIS HAVE WANTED QUICK ASSEMBLY ACTION ON THEIR FAVORITE MEASURES, AND THIS HAS NOT ALWAYS HAPPENED. INSTEAD THE ASSEMBLY HAS BEEN TIED UP FOR DAYS OR WEEKS THIS YEAR WITH WHAT THE EXECUTIVE SEES AS MINOR ISSUES, PERSONAL VENDETTAS, AND FORMALISTIC RITUAL. IN SUM, THERE MAY INDEED HAVE BEEN THE SERIOUS AND GROWING IMPATIENCE WITH THE ASSEMBLY TO WHICH THE AMIR'S SPEECH OF AUGUST 29 (REF A) ALLUDED.

5. SAUDI AND GULF STATE PRESSURES. SABAH RULING FAMILY WAS ALSO AWARE OF SHARP CRITICISM FROM NEIGHBORING GULF STATES AND FROM SAUDI ARABIA OVER KUWAIT'S "DEMOCRATIC EXPERIEMENT" WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THERE HAS BEEN SOME EVIDENCE OF GROWING INFLUENCE OF SAUDI KING KHALID OVER AMIR AND SABAH FAMILY LEADERS. ALTHOUGH TREND IN KUWAIT HAS BEEN TOWARD AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC SOCIETY, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME BACKWARD STEPS - BANNING OF PORK IMPORTS, TIGHTER ANTI-LIQUOR POLICY, DISAPPROVAL OF MIXED PUBLIC SWIMMING IN HOTELS - WHICH MAY REFLECT KUWAIT EFFORTS TO DEMONSTRATE ITS CONTINUED ATTACHMENT TO THE "SPIRIT OF OUR ISLAMIC SHARI'AH" REFERRED TO IN AMIR'S DECREE ON SUSPENSION OF CERTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS. MOREOVER, ON THE BROADER ARAB PLANE, KUWAIT HAS BEEN COOPERATING WITH SAUDI ARABIA IN VARIOUS MEDIATORY EFFORTS (E.G. PROPOSAL TO HOLD ARAB SUMMIT ON LEBANON), SO THAT SUSCEPTIBILITY TO SAUDI INFLUENCE IS GREATER NOW THAN HAS BEEN CASE IN PAST WHEN KUWAITIS OFTEN RESISTED SAUDI PRESSURES.

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BESIDES, BAHRAINI EXAMPLE IN DISSOLVING ASSEMBLY PROVIDED PRECEDENT FOR SABAHS.

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00

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PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIE-00 /072 W

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O P 301345Z AUG 76

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY

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USMISSION GENEVA

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AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY

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AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 6)

6. SECURITY AND STABILITY. NEVERTHELESS, WE BELIEVE THAT THE EXTERNAL FACTORS ATTRIBUTABLE TO PRESSURES FROM SAUDI AND GULF STATES MAY BE REGARDED AS PERIPHERAL. MORE TO THE POINT IS THE STATEMENT CONTAINED IN CROWN PRINCE/PRIME MINISTER JABER AL-AHMAD'S LETTER OF RESIGFATION (TEXT BEING PROVIDED SEPTTEL):
QUOTE: "ALSO, THE CRUCIAL AND CRITICAL CONDITIONS THROUGH WHICH OUR AREA AND THE ARAB WORLD IN GENERAL ARE PASSING REQUIRE SPEEDY DECISIONS ON MANY SENSITIVE MATTERS AND THE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION TO PROTECT THE SECURITY AND ECONOMY OF OUR COUNTRY." UNQUOTE.

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CONCERN FOR THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THE KUWAIT STATE APPEARS TO UNDERLIE ACTIONS BY KUWAIT LEADERSHIP IN THIS AFFAIR. THE NEED FOR INCREASING ATTENTION TO BE DEVOTED TO THE LOCAL SECURITY SITUATION, WHERE, IN ADDITION OCCASIONAL RECENT ACTS OF VIOLENCE, THE PRESENCE OF 250,000 PALESTINIANS REPRESENTS A POTENTIAL MENACE TO KUWAIT'S STABILITY IN THESE DISTURBED TIMES. SINCE GOK, LIKE REST OF US, HAS NO CLEAR VIEW OF HOW LEBANESE CRISIS

WILL BE SOLVED -- OR IF SITUATION THERE WILL CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE -- AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, OF WHAT WILL BE IMPACT ON KUWAIT OF PALESTINIAN SETBACK AND REACTION TO PROBABLE RESTRICTED ROLE IN LEBANON, SABAH LEADERSHIP SEEMS TO HAVE DECIDED TO "BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES" TO FORESTALL THE WORST EVENTUALITY, NAMELY, THAT KUWAIT WOULD OFFER PROSPECT OF NEW BATTLEGROUND FOR THE PALESTINE MOVEMENT. POTENTIAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN LEFTIST KUWAITI ELEMENTS, PERSONIFIED BY VOCAL GROUP OF ASSEMBLYMEN, SUCH AS DR. AHMAD KHATIB, AND RADICAL PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS COULD ALSO REPRESENT THREAT TO STATE'S STABILITY.

7. PRESS CONTROL. IN SAME MANNER, IRRESPONSIBLE AND RADICAL PRESS DOMINATED BY PALESTINIANS WHO HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTING TO DISARRAY IN ARAB WORLD IN VERBAL SENSE COULD NOT BE TOLERATED UNDER THESE CONDITIONS. THUS, SIMULTANEOUS STEPS TO PLACE RAMBUNCTIOUS AND MERCENARY KUWAITI PRESS UNDER TIGHT CONTROL WERE ALSO ORDERED BY AMIR (REF A). THIS DECREE FOLLOWED UP BY MEETING OF DEPRIMIN/INFOMIN SHAIKH JABER AL-ALI WHO CALLED IN ALL PUBLISHER/CHIEF EDITORS OF KUWAITI NEWSPAPERS EVENING OF AUG 29 (BEING REPORTED SEPARATELY).

8. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT. SINCE ALL THESE STEPS REQUIRED SUSPENSION OF CERTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS, THIS WAS ALSO DONE BY AMIRI DECREE (REF A). FACT THAT, ACCORDING TO AMIR, COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS WILL BE FORMED TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION AND THAT AMENDMENTS WILL BE PUT TO POPULAR REFERENDUM OR TO NEXT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY "WITHIN A PERIOD NOT EXCEEDING FOUR YEARS FROM THE ISSUANCE OF THE ORDER" INDICATES THAT THESE STEPS ARE NOT VIEWED AS A SHORT TERM ACTION.

9. TIMING. THE TIMING OF THESE ACTIONS, BESIDES BEING CAREFULLY CONCEALED, SEEMS TO BE PROPITIOUS. COMING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN AND AT THE HEIGHT OF THE FIERCE SUMMER HEAT WHEN ACTIVITY IS AT LOW EBB, IT COULD BE IMAGINED THAT POPULAR
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RFQHION WOULD BE MINIMAL. MOREOVER, WITH THE STUDENTS NOT YET RETURNED TO THE UNIVERSITY AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLYMEN OFF ON PROTRACTED VACATIONS AND TOURS, THE MORE VOLATILE ELEMENTS OF POPULATION ARE SCATTERED AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, THE TIMING WAS CERTAINLY NOT A PREDOMINANT FACTOR AND SABAH RULING FAMILY HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN CONSIDERING SUCH A MOVE DELIBERATELY AND CAREFULLY.

10. CABINET. AUG 30 MORNING KUWAIT PRESS CONTAINS SOME SPECULATION ON NEW CABINET, BUT NOTHING FIRM. MEANWHILE, ALL MINISTERS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE REMAINING ON THE JOB TEMPORARILY UNTIL REPLACED OR FORMALLY REINSTATED. WE EXPECT THAT HIATUS WILL BE SHORT, AND DO NOT BELIEVE THAT GOK ACTIVITY WILL BE HELD UP IN ANY SERIOUS WAY.

11.LCCONCLUSION. WHILE IN THE LIGHT OF THESE CONCERNS AND
IN CONTEXT OF DISTURBED SITUATION IN ARAB WORLD, THESE AMIRI
ACTIONS MAY NOT BE VIEWED AS ESPECIALLY REMARKABLE, FACT OF
SUSPENSION OF DEMOCRATIC EXPERIEMENT, OF WHICH KUWAITIS WERE SO
PROUD AND WHICH SET THEM APART FROM THEIR "BACKWARD NEIGHBORS,"
REFLECTS REAL ANXIETY WHICH SABAH LEADERSHIP FEELS ABOUT THE
FUTURE. IT ALSO PROVIDES SIGNAL TO THOSE ELEMENTS WHICH MIGHT
HAVE LOOKED UPON KUWAIT AS A POSSIBLE VENUE FOR FUTURE ACTIVITY
THAT GOK IS PREPARED TO PUT UP FIRM RESISTANCE. THUS, IN ESSENCE,
WE BELIEVE THAT WHAT WE SEE HERE IN KUWAIT IS NOT A RESPONSE TO AN
ALREADY CRITICAL SITUATION, BUT RATHER PREVENTIVE ACTION TO AVOID
POSSIBLE CALAMITY5
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRIME MINISTER, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, REORGANIZATIONS, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976KUWAIT04139
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760329-0610
From: KUWAIT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976087/aaaaafwb.tel
Line Count: 291
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 KUWAIT 4127, 76 KUWAIT 4022
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 MAY 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <09 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EMBASSY COMMENTS ON KUWAITI CABINET RESIGNATION AND DISSOLUTION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, KU
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006